

# The South African Working Class and the National Democratic Revolution

## 1. Introduction

The increased tempo of struggle in our country in the last few years has stimulated a great deal of theoretical debate and political discussion among those in the very front line of the upsurge. Workers in the factories, youth in the townships, mass and underground activists, radical intellectuals, cadres of Umkhonto we Sizwe, militants at all levels are seeking answers to the pressing strategic, tactical and organisational questions of the day. Increasing numbers of our people understand the essence of Lenin's political maxim: **Without revolutionary theory, there can be no real revolutionary movement.**

These discussions and debates keep coming back, in one way or another, to certain fundamentals: class struggle and national struggle, the question of stages of struggle, inter-class alliances, and the role of our working class in the liberation front. Many of these debates are between people who share common starting points; a belief that national domination is linked to capitalism and an acceptance of the goal of a socialist South Africa. But there is not always clarity on the most effective tactical road towards this goal.

A tendency, loosely described as 'workerism', denies that the main content of the immediate conflict is national liberation which it regards as a diversion from the class struggle. Even if it admits the relevance of national domination in the exploitative processes, **'workerism' insists on a perspective of an immediate struggle for socialism.**

A transitional stage of struggle, involving inter-class alliances, is alleged to lead to an abandonment of socialist perspectives and to a surrender of working class leadership. The economic struggles between workers and bosses at the point of production (which inevitably spill over into the broader political arena) is claimed to be the 'class struggle'. This is sometimes coupled with a view that the trade union movement is the main political representative of the working class.

A more sophisticated version of the left-workerist position has recently surfaced among union-linked academics. This version concedes the need for inter-class alliances but puts forward a view of working class political organisation more appropriate to a trade union than a revolutionary political vanguard.

At the other end of this debate there are views which tend to erect a chinese wall between the struggle for national liberation and social emancipation. **Our struggle is seen as 'bourgeois-democratic' in character so that the immediate agenda should not go beyond the objective of a kind of 'de-raced' capitalism.** According to this view there will be time enough after apartheid is destroyed to then turn our attention to the struggle for socialism. Hence there should be little talk of our ultimate socialist objectives. The working class should not insist on the inclusion of **radical** social measures as part of the immediate agenda because that would risk frightening away potential allies against apartheid.

Topical interest in the political shape and content of post-apartheid society has also brought into focus the question of group rights as opposed, or additional, to individual rights. The racists, of course, exploit 'group rights' and 'multi-nationalism' as a lifeline to their continued domination. But this does not dispose of the question as to whether there is a legitimate basis for a multinational framework in a future people's South Africa.

The existence of cultural and ethnic diversity **side by side** with unifying processes, has aroused friendly queries on our approach to the national question. **Do we believe that our peoples already constitute one nation? If not, are they (or should they be) moving towards single or separate nationhood? What is the future of the cultural and linguistic diversity and how do we cater for this diversity within the framework of a unitary state?**

From some of our left-wing critics comes the charge that our thesis of colonialism of a special type necessarily implies that there are two nations in South Africa — the oppressor (white) and the oppressed (black). A variant of this critique is that the Freedom Charter hints at the existence of four nations when it talks of 'equal status' for 'all national groups and races'.

For South African communists the questions and debates we have mentioned above have not arisen for the first time. For over 66 years we have attempted to find the answers and to apply them in the actual arena of struggle. We do not claim that we have a monopoly of wisdom. But, equipped with the theoretical tool of Marxism-Leninism and the inheritance of an unmatched wealth of revolutionary experience, it is not immodest for us to assert that our Party is uniquely qualified to help illuminate the correct analytical path. This is a process which calls for both creativity and intellectual openness. It also requires a continuing exchange of ideas not only within the ranks of the Party but also between us and all non-Party serious revolutionary activists.

Genuine worries about some of our approaches and formulations (whether from a 'right' or 'left' position) must be debated and not merely dismissed. In this spirit, then, we proceed to consider the following:

- Class struggle and national struggle
- The stages of struggle
- Working class leadership
- The building of the South African nation

We hope that this pamphlet will help expand the discussion of the theoretical basis of our revolutionary practice in the present phase of the struggle.

## **2. Class Struggle and National Struggle**

The South African Communist Party, in its 1984 constitution, declares that its aim is to lead the working class towards the **strategic goal** of establishing a **socialist republic** 'and the more immediate aim of winning the objectives of the **national democratic revolution which is inseparably linked to it**'. The constitution describes the main content of the national democratic revolution as

'...the national liberation of the African people in particular, and the black people in general, the destruction of the economic and political power of the racist ruling class, and the establishment of one united state of people's power in which the working class will be the dominant force and which will **move uninterruptedly towards social emancipation and the total abolition of exploitation of man by man**'.

The national democratic revolution — the present stage of struggle in our country is a revolution of the **whole oppressed people**. This does not mean that the oppressed 'people' can be regarded as a single or homogeneous entity. The main revolutionary camp in the immediate struggle is made up of different classes and strata (overwhelmingly black) which suffer varying forms and degrees of national oppression and economic exploitation. The camp of those who benefit from, and support, national domination is also divided into classes.

Some 'learned theorists' are continuously warning workers against talk of a 'revolution of the whole oppressed people', accusing those who use such formulations of being 'populists' rather than revolutionaries. Let us hear Lenin on this question since he was also in the habit of using the same words to describe the upsurge in Russia:

'Yes, the *people's* revolution. Social Democracy ... demands that this word shall not be used to cover up failure to understand class antagonisms within the people ... **However, it does not divide the "people" into "classes" so that the advanced class becomes locked up within itself ... the advanced class ... should fight with all the**

**greater energy and enthusiasm for the cause of the whole people, at the head of the whole people'** (*Selected Works*, Volume 1, p.503).

Of course, the long-term interests of the diverse classes and strata of the revolutionary camp do not necessarily coincide. They do not have the same consistency and commitment even to the immediate objectives of the democratic revolution. It is obviously from within the ranks of the black middle and upper strata that the enemy will look for sources of collaboration. We will return to this question.

**But, in general, it remains true that our National Democratic Revolution expresses the broad objective interests not only of the working class but also of most of the other classes within the nationally-dominated majority, including the black petit-bourgeoisie and significant strata of the emergent black bourgeoisie.** This reality provides the foundation for a struggle which aims to mobilise to its side all the oppressed classes and strata as participants in the national liberation alliance.

We believe that the working class is both an indispensable part and the leading force of such a liberation alliance. But its relations with other classes and strata cannot be conditional on the acceptance by them of socialist aims. The historic programme which has evolved to express the common immediate aspirations of all the classes of the oppressed people is the Freedom Charter. This document is not, in itself, a programme for socialism, even though (as we argue later) it can provide a basis for uninterrupted advance to a socialist future.

The recent surge in workers' organisation and socialist thinking has highlighted some important questions:

- Does the immediate emphasis on the national democratic revolution imply that the working class should abandon **class struggle** in favour of **national struggle**?
- Are socialist objectives being shelved in favour of a struggle for so-called bourgeois democracy?
- Which class must play the vanguard role in our democratic revolution?
- Above all, how can the **independent class role of the working class** be safeguarded in a period demanding inter-class alliances?

The answer to these questions and the key to a correct determination of strategy and tactics in our present situation requires a correct grasp of the **relationship** between **class** and **national** struggle.

If we pose the question by asking only whether our struggle is a national struggle or a class struggle, we will inevitably get a wrong answer. The right question is: what is the **relationship** between these two categories. A failure to understand the **class content of the national struggle and the national content of the class struggle** in

existing conditions can hold back the advance of both the democratic and socialist transformations which we seek.

The immediate primacy of the struggle against race tyranny flows from the concrete realities of our existing situation. The concept of national domination is not a mystification to divert us from class approaches; it infects every level of class exploitation. Indeed, it divides our working class into colour compartments. Therefore, unusual categories such as 'white working class' and 'black working class' are not 'unscientific' but simply describe the facts.

National domination is maintained by a ruling class whose state apparatus protects the economic interests and social privileges of all classes among the white minority. It denies the aspiration of the African people towards a single nationhood and, in its place, attempts to perpetuate tribalism and ethnicity. These, and a host of related practices, are the visible daily manifestations of national domination. These practices affect the status and life of every black in every class. It is, however, the black working class which, in practice, suffers the most intense form of national domination. And those who dismiss the fight against national domination as the key immediate mobilising factor of our working class are living in an unreal world of their own.

It is encouraging to observe the recent spread of an understanding of the link between national domination and class exploitation among organised sectors of the working class. This spread is due primarily to the heightened experiences of the struggle against race domination in the recent period.

Socialist ideas take root not just through book knowledge but through struggle around day-to-day issues. And, for those who have to live the hourly realities and humiliations of race tyranny (at the point of production, in the townships, in the street, etc.) there is no issue more immediate and relevant than the experience of national oppression. This is certainly the starting point of political consciousness for every black worker.

It is mainly in the actual struggle against national oppression that its class roots can be grasped most effectively. It is that struggle which illuminates most brightly the underlying relationship in our country between capitalism and national domination.

Those who would like to restrict the meaning of class struggle to a trade union struggle against the bosses, and who see political struggle only through narrow economic spectacles, would do well to heed Lenin's words on these questions:

'Is it true that, in general, the economic struggle is "the most widely applicable means" of drawing the masses in to political struggle? It is entirely untrue. Any and every manifestation of police tyranny and autocratic outrage, not only in connection with the economic struggle, is not one whit less "widely applicable" as a

means of drawing in the masses ... Of the sum total of cases in which the workers suffer (either on their own account or on account of those closely connected with them) from tyranny, violence and lack of rights, undoubtedly only a small minority represent cases of police tyranny in the trade union struggle as such' (*Selected Works*, Volume 1, p.136).

Class struggle in a period of capitalist hegemony is, in the long run, a political struggle for the ultimate winning of power by the working people. But the content of this class struggle does not remain fixed for all time; it is dictated by the concrete situation at a given historical moment. We cannot confine the meaning of class struggle to those rare moments when the immediate winning of socialist power is on the agenda. When workers engage in the national struggle to destroy race domination they are surely, at the same time, engaging in class struggle.

Class struggle does not fade into the background when workers forge alliances with other class forces on commonly agreed minimum programmes. The history of all struggles consists mainly of such interim phases. What is the essence of conflict during such phases if not class struggle? There is no such thing as 'pure' class struggle and those who seek it can only do so from the isolating comfort of a library arm-chair. The idea that social revolutions involve two neatly-labelled armies was dealt with by Lenin with bitter irony:

'So one army lines up in one place and says "we are for socialism" and another, somewhere else and says, "we are for imperialism", and that will be a social revolution! ... Whoever expects a "pure" social revolution will never live to see it. Such a person pays lip-service to revolution without understanding what revolution is'. (*Collected Works*, Volume 22, pp. 355-6).

The workers in Vietnam were not abandoning the class struggle when they concentrated their main energies, in alliance with other class forces, on defeating Japanese militarist occupation, French colonialism, and finally US imperialism and its puppet forces. When Hitler unleashed world war, the main content of the workers' class struggle correctly became the defeat of fascism. This task necessitated the most 'popular' of Fronts which brought together both pro- and anti-socialist forces. It is a matter of historical record that the anti-fascist victory made possible, among other things, the greatest extension of the socialist world since the October Revolution and opened the road to successful anti-imperialist, anti-colonial revolutions.

When we exhort our working class to devote its main energies (in alliance with the other nationally oppressed classes) to the immediate task of winning national liberation, we are certainly not diluting the class struggle or retreating from it. On the contrary, we are advancing and reinforcing it in the only manner which is practicable at the present time.

Nor are we putting off the socialist revolution by an emphasis on the National Democratic objectives of the immediate phase of struggle. In the words of Lenin, answering critics of Bolshevik policy on the primacy of the democratic revolution, 'we are not putting (the socialist revolution) off but are taking the first steps towards it in the only possible way, along with the correct path, namely the path of a democratic republic' (*Selected Works*, Volume 1, p.435). Our immediate emphasis on the struggle for democracy and 'People's Power' is an essential prerequisite for the longer-term advance towards a socialist transformation.

But national liberation is, at the same time, a short-term class imperative for the working people. Because the tyranny of national oppression weighs more heavily on South Africa's doubly- exploited working class than on any other working class, its destruction by the shortest route possible is, in itself, in the deepest class interests of our proletariat. Both immediately and in the long-term, our working class stands to gain more from the ending of national domination than any other class among the oppressed.

These realities help define the main form and content of the workers' class struggle at the present historical moment and the kind of alliances necessary to advance working class objectives. A 'class struggle' which ignores these truths can only be fought out in the lecture-room and not in the actual arena of struggle.

But the need to concentrate on the present does not imply an abandonment or disregard for the future. We shall argue more fully in a later section that participation by the working class in the democratic revolution (involving alliances, minimum programmes, etc.) does not imply a dilution of its independent class positions.

There is, moreover, no need for the spread of socialist awareness among the working people to be postponed during the phase emphasising the democratic transformation a belief falsely attributed to our Party by some of its left-wing critics. During this period it is vital to maintain and deepen working class understanding of the interdependence between national liberation and social emancipation. This task cannot be postponed until the ANC flag flies over Pretoria.

It follows from the above that the participation of our working class and its political vanguard in the liberation alliance is both a long-term and short-term class necessity. The SACP's involvement in such an alliance is not, as our left-wing critics allege, a form of 'tailism' or 'populism'. Nor, as our right-wing detractors would have it, is it an opportunistic ploy to camouflage our so-called 'hidden agenda' and to use the ANC merely as a stepping stone to socialism.

We have never made a secret of our belief that the shortest route to socialism is via a democratic state. But, as already mentioned, the SACP takes part in the alliance

for yet another extremely cogent reason; our belief that the elimination of national domination (which is the prime objective of the Alliance) is, at the same time, the most immediate class concern of our proletariat.

But it is also the concern of the other main classes within the dominated majority. Bearing in mind their class positions, is there an objective basis for a programme which can attract these classes to the side of the liberation front and do so without compromising the fundamental interests of the working class?

### **The Black Middle Strata and the Emerging Black Bourgeoisie**

We have said that the national democratic revolution expresses the broad objective interests of the working class and most of the other classes which make up the nationally-dominated minority. We will return to the special position of the bureaucratic bourgeoisie in the bantustans and in the townships, whose very existence depends upon collaboration with race domination.

Our approach to the multi-class content of the present phase of our struggle has received a great deal of attention from some of our 'left' critics. But because they have distorted our approach by knocking down skittles which they themselves have put up, we need to devote a few words to the obvious.

**It is obvious** that the black capitalist class favours capitalism and that it will do its best to influence the post-apartheid society in this direction.

**It is obvious** that the black middle and upper classes who take part in a broad liberation alliance will jostle for hegemony and attempt to represent their interests as the interests of all Africans.

**It is obvious** that (like their counterparts in every part of the world) the black middle and upper strata, who find themselves on the side of the people's struggle, are often inconsistent and vacillating. They are usually the enemy's softest targets for achieving a reformist, rather than a revolutionary, outcome.

All this is pretty obvious. But it is equally obvious that if the working class and its vanguard and mass organisations were to get locked up with themselves, the greatest harm would be done to the cause of both national liberation and social emancipation. **By rejecting class alliances and going it alone, the working class would in fact be surrendering the leadership of the national struggle to the upper and middle strata.** This would become the shortest route towards a sell-out reformist solution and a purely capitalist post-apartheid South Africa under the hegemony of a bourgeois-dominated black national movement. Along this path, 'class purity' will surely lead to class suicide and 'socialist'-sounding slogans will actually hold back the achievement of socialism.



The black middle and upper strata constitute a relatively significant political force, particularly in community struggles. Whether we like it or not they will participate and, often, take a leading part in such struggles. They are usually among the most vocal articulators of demands and (as we have experienced with black consciousness) they are sometimes the pioneers of new variants of purely nationalist ideology.

The question, therefore, is not whether they are participants in the struggle. The real question is whether the working class, by refusing to establish a common trench, helps push them right into the enemy's lap. On the other hand, by engaging with them on common minimum platforms, the working class is able to forge a stronger opposition and also to neutralise some of the negative potential of the middle class.

It is, in any case, a basic maxim of working class revolutionary strategy that, at every stage, it is necessary to **maximise the forces which can be mobilised against the ruling class around a principled common immediate programme**. But this does not depend just on an appeal to the individual conscience which occasionally (as we have recently witnessed among a small minority of the white community) rebels against its class roots and group interests.

When, however, it comes to the behaviour pattern of class entities, experience has shown that, in general, they are motivated primarily by a desire to protect their economic interests. It follows that to determine which social force can, at a specific moment, be won over to the side of the revolution (without compromising its main objectives) requires, in the first place, an analysis of basic economic factors which will influence their participation. In other words, a shared opposition to race domination at the social level may not, on its own, be sufficient to cement an inter-class alliance.

Is there an objective basis (having its roots in economic class interests) for drawing the black middle and upper classes into an inter-class alliance in the immediate struggle to destroy national domination? We believe that the answer is clearly yes. Let us take note of more recent ruling class activities in this area.

In the last decade the size of the black upper and middle classes has increased. The state has relaxed a few obstacles to class mobility. Some sectors of white business have selectively encouraged black entry into previously forbidden territory. Neither the state nor business have hidden their motivation for these measures. They are designed to create a more significant black social force with a vested interest in the status quo and capitalism; a force which, they hope, will distance itself from the liberation struggle or, perhaps, even take it over.

Despite the 'reforms' and peripheral concessions of the last decade, **the immediate fate of the black middle and upper classes remains linked much more with that of the black working people than with their equivalents across the colour line.** For reasons of colour their class mobility cannot proceed beyond a certain point. They are still hemmed in by national disabilities economic, cultural, social and political which separate them from their white class counterparts.

At the economic level, reforms notwithstanding, national oppression continues to affect black capitalists in the accumulation process. With some exceptions, they cannot own land or property in the central business districts. They are disadvantaged when it comes to access to credit and loan capital, etc. And, at the social and cultural levels, a black capitalist continues to share with a black worker most of the humiliations of inferior colour status.

A few black capitalists may now be able to rub shoulders with tycoons like Oppenheimer at some board-room meetings as a symbol of 'black advancement', but they cannot leave their ghettos to live next door to their fellow directors, sit in a common parliament, assert a right for their immediate family from rural areas to resettle in their home towns, and so on. It is only the most vulgar and deterministic forms of economism which can underplay the impact of these, and so many other, ravages of national domination which do not exempt a single class or group within the black community.

But, as we have already argued, ultimately it is the economic factor which plays the primary role in determining class alignments. Conflicting class approaches to the nature of the immediate post-apartheid society may well, in practice, overshadow existing economic discrimination and the common black aversion to white rule. A Motsuenyane is more likely to opt for remaining a capitalist in a race-dominated society if the alternative is that he will become a worker in a people's South Africa. In addition, therefore, to the social impact of race practices which variously affect all black classes and strata, is there an objective **economic foundation** for an inter-class black alliance?

There **is** such an objective foundation. It is grounded in a perspective of an interim phase in the post-apartheid period which neither threatens the **immediate** economic aspirations of the **other nationally-dominated classes nor militates against the fundamental interests of the workers.** This perspective is not (as our 'left' detractors allege) tailored merely to suck broad elements into the liberation front.[1]

Nor does it, in any way, constitute a retreat from a commitment to end all forms of exploitation of man by man.

We have never hidden our conviction, which we continue to proclaim, that true national liberation is ultimately impossible without social liberation. The Freedom Charter and our Party Programme do not, however, project socialism as the immediate consequence of a people's victory. During this phase a vital role, under specified conditions, will undoubtedly be required of a private sector.[2]

Even where the socialist transformation is directly on the agenda, the role of the private sector cannot be dismissed. Leaving aside the lunatic excesses of Pol Pot's Kampuchea, many hard lessons in this area have been learnt by some of the established socialist states and, more recently, by African parties dedicated to a socialist advance. The transition period to socialism may well demand a maintenance of selective parts of the private sector. A mechanical and generalised elimination of this sector for the sake of satisfying sloganised orthodoxy, has often served to undermine the faith of the working people in the capacity of socialism to 'deliver the goods'.

We will come back to the need for immediate steps to be taken in the post-apartheid period to break the economic stranglehold of the monopolies and to transform a major portion of wealth from private into social property. Suffice it to say that **such measures will, of necessity, result in an immediate sizeable contraction of the private sector.** Ninety nine per cent of this sector is presently owned and controlled by white capitalists; a race monopoly which constitutes the key instrument of national domination.

At the same time it would be harmful demagogy and a recipe for chaos to proclaim that the post-apartheid state will be able, at a stroke, to do away completely with the market economy, to eliminate the whole private sector and to dispense with the accumulated business experiences and management skills of this sector. With the lifting of the race barriers, those black businessmen who have been the victims of race-stunted growth, will certainly find more immediate room for expansion than they were ever permitted under apartheid rule. The anti-monopoly provisions of the Freedom Charter will also open up avenues for the relative growth of black business in the post-apartheid phase.

**In other words, under a people's government the black middle and upper classes will be better off economically (and in every other aspect of their lives) than they are now. In this sense the national democratic revolution represents their immediate interests as a class; it provides a legitimate and principled basis for the kind of inter-class alliance which is projected by our liberation front.**[3]

Those who fear that all this amounts to the expansion of capitalism in the post-colonial state would do well to remember that we are talking about a minute group (the black middle and upper strata) which just about produces two per cent of the gross national product, mainly in the tertiary sector. In any case, the expansion of

its growth as a result of the lifting of racial barriers in trade and manufacture will, in terms of the Freedom Charter, be controlled 'to assist the well-being of the people'.

In the context of a severe clipping of the wings of the overwhelming mass of existing private capital, it is sheer ultra- leftist demagoguery to describe this approach as a commitment to a capitalist road in the state.[4] It cannot be denied that a private sector of whatever size will inevitably help to generate negative social and ideological tendencies. But social control over the main means of production and distribution by a political power in which the working class is dominant should more than counter- balance such tendencies.

What we have said about the black middle and upper classes does not apply to all its segments. We have always been careful to treat the emergent black **bureaucratic bourgeoisie** as a special category even though there is a degree of interchangeability between it and other strata.

The **bureaucratic bourgeoisie** is a stratum that depends for its capital accumulation more or less entirely on its position within the collaborative structures of apartheid bantustan 'governments', community councils, management committees, etc. It enriches itself often through fraud and corruption, and uses access to the collaborative structures to allocate to itself land, trading premises and other resources. Its genesis and demise depend solely on the survival of race domination and (individual defections aside) it will share a trench with the enemy.

The allegiance of the other middle and upper black strata to the immediate objectives of the liberation struggle cannot be taken for granted; it has to be fought for on the ground. The ruling class can be expected to contend with the liberation alliance for the political soul of these strata, exploiting their class potential for vacillation and their preference for reformist, rather than revolutionary, transformation.

The alliance of the working class with forces which reject its long-term socialist aspirations is never unproblematic and without tension. It requires constant vigilance and, above all, the safeguarding of the independence of the vanguard and mass class organs of the workers. The question of the inter-class alliance brings us to a related issue — the so-called two-stage theory of the South African revolution.

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# The South African Working Class and the National Democratic Revolution

## *Second Part*

### **3. Stages of Struggle**

The concept of stages in struggle is not an unusual one for any political activist. Those engaged in revolutionary practice, whether in a trade union or in a political party, do not require a seminar to be convinced that struggle goes through stages. Even the most localised struggles, for example the struggle for an annual wage increase in a particular industry or factory, or a struggle against high rents in a particular township, go through stages. The same applies to the overall struggle.

Our belief that the immediate content of our struggle is the national liberation of our whole people and that this process cannot ultimately be completed without social emancipation at once poses a perspective of stages in our revolution. This perspective has generated a great deal of criticism from 'leftist' circles.

We do indeed see the current stage of struggle the national democratic phase as the most direct route of advance, in our particular conditions, to a second stage, socialist development. Looking even further ahead, it is valid to describe socialism itself as a major transitional stage on the road to communism.

There is, however, both a **distinction** and a **continuity** between the national democratic and socialist revolutions; **they can neither be completely telescoped nor completely compartmentalised**. The vulgar Marxists are unable to understand this. They claim that our immediate emphasis on the objectives of the national democratic revolution implies that we are unnecessarily postponing or even abandoning the socialist revolution, as if the two revolutions have no connection with one another. They have a mechanical approach to the stages of our revolution, treating them simply as water-tight compartments.[5]

It should, however, be conceded that our own formulations have sometimes been imprecise, and have invited the charge that we treat stages as compartments, as 'things-in-themselves'.

It is necessary at once to state a rather obvious proposition, namely, that it is implied in the very concept of stages that they can never be considered in isolation; they are steps in development. A stage which has no relation to a destination in itself not final and constituting a stage for yet another destination is a linguistic and logical absurdity. The concept 'stage' implies that it is at one and the same time a point of arrival and a point of departure.

The real question is how to reach a stage without blocking the route onwards to the next destination. This depends (mainly) on revolutionary practice. On balance we can justly claim that our own revolutionary practice has not departed from the 'continuity' concept of stages.

We reiterate that when we talk of stages we are talking simultaneously about distinct phases and a continuous journey. At the same time revolutionary practice demands that within each distinct stage there should be a selective concentration on those objectives which are most pertinent to its completion. This in no way detracts from the need to plant, within its womb, the seeds which will ensure a continuity towards the next stage.

There is thus no Chinese wall between stages. Lenin emphasised this point when he said:

'We all categorise bourgeois revolution and socialist revolution, we all insist on the absolute necessity of strictly distinguishing between them. However, can it be denied that in the course of history individual particular elements of the two revolutions become interwoven?' (*Selected Works*, Volume 1, p.482, pp. 511-2)

We, for our part, insist on the need to understand the distinct characteristics of the present stage of our revolution, and also the ideological and organisational bridge between this stage and the socialist aspirations of our working class.

It is not inevitable that final destinations follow from particular preceding stages. We have, for example, always believed that under South African conditions the national democratic revolution has great prospects of proceeding at once to socialist solutions. This is because no significant national demand can be completely fulfilled without the eventual destruction of the existing capitalist structure. But this outcome is inevitable only in the abstract sense. Its translation into a reality must be dependent on a number of vital subjective factors. Among the most important of these is the extent to which the most revolutionary class the proletariat is politicised and participates as a leading force in the coming struggles and in the state forms which are constructed in place of the old.

We will come back to the question of the way our working class must assert its role both for itself and as a leading force in the broader revolutionary line-up. For the moment, let us look a little more closely at the terminology we use to define the main features of the immediate phase of our revolution.

### **Bourgeois-democratic or National-democratic?**

The terminology we use to describe the stages of a revolution can either illuminate or obscure its main objectives. The use of a wrong (albeit analogous) descriptive label to characterise a stage can, and often does, lead to wrong thinking about its content. We can easily be misled by images which are conjured up by descriptive labels which have their origin in a different historical period and which refer to a different moment in a different struggle.

In this connection let us examine the descriptive label — ‘bourgeois democratic’ — which has, now and then, been used to describe the present phase of our revolution. We believe this is a misleading description which obscures the true content of the present stage of our struggle. For a start it invokes quite a wrong analogy with the Russian 1905 and February 1917 revolutions.

It could, of course, be said that we are struggling at this stage for some of those political rights which were articulated by the ideologists of the rising bourgeoisie at the dawn of capitalism (the franchise for all, civil equality, national unity, self-determination, etc.). These have become traditionally labelled ‘bourgeois-democratic rights’. The banner of ‘democracy’ helped the emerging bourgeoisie to mobilise the working people in the towns and the serfs in the countryside against the old feudal order and to establish its own hegemony.

Today, in general, it has become an anachronism to link democratic aspirations with the bourgeoisie. A struggle for democracy in the modern era has little, if anything, to do with the ‘bourgeois-democratic revolution’. Wherever democracy threatens the basis of capitalist economic exploitation the bourgeoisie are the first to abandon it. The Fascist experience exemplifies this point.[6] But, in any case, in regard to our own situation, there are even more compelling reasons for rejecting the label bourgeois-democratic to describe the content of our liberation struggle.

In South Africa, in contrast to 1905 and 1917, it is our bourgeoisie (and not a feudally-based autocracy) which wields economic and political power. Our bourgeoisie is the ruling class in every sense of the term. It has achieved and maintained its hegemony precisely through the mechanism of denying ‘bourgeois-democratic rights’ to the majority of the population. The specific route which

capitalism took in South Africa has led to the creation of a virtually inseparable bond between capitalist exploitation and race domination.

With the exception of a very tiny and economically weak black bourgeoisie, our capitalist ruling class in general continues to be opposed to the universal extension of democracy (as normally understood) to the majority. On the main issues our capitalist class as a whole is, and can be expected to remain, on the side of the retention of race hegemony, albeit by mechanisms which involve some forms of power-sharing.

This conclusion is not negated by the speeches that we hear from some of our tycoons like the Rellys and the Oppenheimers. A few are undoubtedly stirred by a liberal conscience reinforced, perhaps, by the fact that certain aspects of race domination are no longer as profitable as they used to be. There are undoubtedly significant differences at the top on the choice of strategies for coping with the present political and economic crisis. This fact calls for the use of all means, including dialogue, to weaken the unity of the ruling class and to isolate its most reactionary sector; it does not imply that they can become part of the revolutionary camp.

This reality makes a special imprint on the content of the immediate phase of our revolution. For example, it cannot be said of our revolution, as Lenin was able to say of pre-October Russia, that 'the revolution expresses the interests of the entire bourgeoisie as well'. It certainly does not do so in our case. We therefore believe that it is misleading to use the words 'bourgeois-democratic' to describe the present stage. The words National Democratic are closer to our reality. We will return to this question when we touch on the specific social content of our national democratic revolution.

The analytical path along which we have journeyed has been the target of attacks by critics from different positions. Our enemies on the right (including Botha) allege that we control the ANC and that our hidden agenda is the immediate capture of fully-fledged socialist power. Our detractors on the ultra-left accuse us of the very opposite sins; that we are being dragged in the tail of nationalism and that we have abandoned our socialist goals.

But even among some of our close friends and supporters there is a need to share a better understanding of the real content of the immediate social transformation that we seek. For example, in a recent interview Dr V Goncharov[7] is reported to have said that he detected an attempt by some ANC members 'to put before the national liberation movement now the tasks of the socialist revolution' and that this approach poses the danger that they will lose allies in the population'.



Neither the SACP nor the ANC nor any of their authoritative spokespersons have advanced socialism as the immediate objective. Perhaps Dr Goncharov's fears are fertilised by the fact that our National Democratic Revolution has a special content, necessitating immediate social measures (especially in the economic sphere) which appear to have a socialist flavour. The Freedom Charter (which is not a socialist document) contains such elements. If, analytically speaking, we look at the first stage of our revolution through bourgeois-democratic spectacles, we risk confusing (as, I fear, Goncharov does) some of the essential radical changes with socialist transformation.

In other words, there is a distinction between the social content of our National Democratic Revolution and socialist transformation. For reasons which are special to our own situation, the present phase of our revolution contains elements of both national and social emancipation; it is not the classic bourgeois-democratic revolution nor is it yet the socialist revolution. This is so because of the unique relationship between capitalist exploitation and national domination in South Africa.

In the world as a whole, capitalist exploitation does not necessarily involve race domination. But the historically-evolved connection between capitalist exploitation and race domination in South Africa creates a link between national liberation and social emancipation. In our conditions you don't have to be a doctrinaire Marxist to conclude that a liberation which deals only with a rearrangement of the voting system and leaves undisturbed the race monopoly of 99% of our wealth, is no liberation at all. Any honest black nationalist understands that white political privilege has been the device to create and protect white economic privilege.

It is therefore impossible to imagine any real form of national liberation which does not, at the same time, involve a fundamental rearrangement of the ownership and distribution of wealth. Even Gavin Relly, the current boss of Anglo-American, was forced to declare:

'In the economic field, whilst I as a businessman would want the freest environment for the private sector to pursue its interests, I accept that some form of mixed economy is likely ... This is so because there is quite justifiable emphasis on the part of black South Africans on a more equitable distribution of wealth, to compensate for the errors of omission and commission of apartheid'(sic). (*Sunday Times* 1.6.86)

It is precisely our Party's emphasis on the economic content of our National Democratic Revolution which has contributed so much towards the spread of revolutionary nationalism. And it is for the same reason that the Party has won such

an important place in the liberation alliance and gained so much popularity among the workers and youth as an independent vanguard.

It is, of course, imperative (as we have already stressed) that we mobilise the widest democratic unity around a programme of immediate assault on the racist tyranny. However, the economic content of our National Democratic Revolution has to be guarded even at the risk of losing some 'potential allies'. If we retreat too far on this aspect we may entice more 'allies' but, in the process, we would also risk losing our mass revolutionary following. Compared to analogous phases (the Russian 1905 and February 1917 revolutions) certain of the key elements of our democratic revolution are, therefore, much more closely 'interwoven' with the longer-term socialist transformation.

The shortest route to socialism in our country is via a democratic state. But it will be a democratic state which will at once be required to implement economic measures which go far beyond bourgeois-democracy. These economic measures, dictated by the most elementary objectives of our national liberation struggle, will erect a favourable framework for a socialist transformation but will not, in themselves, create, or necessarily lead to, socialism.

A speedy advance towards socialism will depend, primarily, on the place which the working class has won for itself as a leader of society.

#### **4. Working Class Leadership**

If the working class emerges as the dominant social force in a truly democratic post-apartheid state, the possibility is clearly opened up of a peaceful progression towards socialism. Those 'revolutionaries' who may throw up their hands in horror at the suggestion that conditions might open up the possibility of a peaceful transition towards socialism should take note of Lenin's words:

'To become a power the class-conscious workers must win the majority to their side. As long as no violence is used against the people there is no other road to power. We are not Blanquists, we do not stand for the seizure of power by a minority' (*Selected Works*, Vol.2, p.36).

To eventually win the majority of our people for a socialist South Africa, we must spread socialist awareness and socialist consciousness now, mainly among the workers but also among the rural poor and the middle strata. We must also ensure that the working class emerges as the politically-dominant social class in the post-

apartheid state. This can only be achieved if the working class wins a place now as the leading social force in the inter-class liberation alliance.

But, it is not only to ensure a post-apartheid advance towards socialism that the role of the working class is crucial. The immediate objectives of real national liberation as envisaged by the ANC and SACP and whose goals are embodied in the Freedom Charter cannot be effectively fulfilled without the organised strength and leadership of the working class. We emphasise again that if the working class isolates itself from the alliance the result would be to dilute the content of the national democratic revolution, to hand over its direction to the other class forces and, in the long term, to hold back socialist advance.[8]

The working class cannot play the key role by merely leading itself and sloganising about its historic mission. It must win popular acceptance on the ground as the most effective champion of the democratic aspirations of all the racially-oppressed groupings. It must work with, and provide leadership to, our youth, women, intellectuals, small traders, peasants, the rural poor and — yes — even the racially-dominated black bourgeoisie, all of whom are a necessary part of the broad front of our liberation struggle.

It is, however, sometimes alleged that an alliance will tie the hands of the working class and erode its independence. Such an outcome is certainly not inevitable.

The Vietnamese leader, Le Duan, described an alliance as a 'unity of opposites'. The classes and strata which come together in a front of struggle usually have different long-term interests and, often, even contradictory expectations from the immediate phase. The search for agreement usually leads to a minimum platform which excludes some of the positions of the participating classes or strata. It follows that an alliance can only be created if these diverse forces are prepared to enter into a compromise. And it can only survive and flourish if it is governed by a democratic relationship between the groupings which have come together.

But when a front is created the working class does not just melt into it. It does not abandon its independent class objectives or independent class organisation. On the contrary, the strengthening of workers' independent mass and vanguard structures is even more imperative in periods demanding organised relations with other class forces. This brings us directly to the organisational instruments of working class leadership.

## **The Instruments of Working Class Leadership**

In general, workers must be active wherever people come together in struggle, whether at national, regional or local levels. The whole mass democratic movement the UDF, youth organisations, women's organisations, civics, street committees, students, church-goers, etc., must feel the influence of workers' militancy and dedication. The majority of most of these categories are, in any case, workers who should ensure, through democratic participation, that their interests are not swamped by the other social groupings.

The independent role of the working class and the way it relates to other classes of our society, at once raises important questions connected with the character and role of three key worker-related sectors of our struggle: the national movement, the trade union movement and the political party of the working class. It also raises questions about the way in which these sectors relate to one another. Let us say a few words about each of these sectors.

### **Trade Unions and the Working Class**

A trade union is the prime mass organisation of the working class. To fulfil its purpose, it must be as broad as possible and fight to maintain its legal status. It must attempt, in the first place, to unite, on an industrial basis, all workers (at whatever level of political consciousness) who understand the elementary need to come together and defend and advance their economic conditions. It cannot demand more as a condition of membership. But because the state and its political and repressive apparatus is an instrument of the dominant economic classes, it is impossible for trade unions in any part of the world to keep out of the broader political conflict.

Especially in our country, where racist domination and capitalist exploitation are two sides of the same coin, it is even more clear that a trade union cannot stand aside from the liberation struggle. Indeed, the trade union movement is the most important mass contingent of the working class. Its organised involvement in struggle, both as an independent force and as part of the broad liberation alliance, undoubtedly reinforces the dominant role of the workers as a class. In addition, trade unions' and workers' experience of struggle in unions provide the most fertile field in which to school masses of workers in socialist understanding and political consciousness.

The very fact that the workers' economic struggle cannot be separated from the struggle against national domination has helped to blur the border-line between

trade unionism and the political leadership of the working class as a whole. It is, however, vital to maintain the distinction between trade union politics and overall revolutionary leadership. A trade union cannot carry out this dual role; if it attempted to do so it would have to change its basic character and risk committing suicide as a mass legal force. In addition, the very nature and purpose of trade unionism disqualifies it from carrying out the tasks of a revolutionary vanguard.[9]

The syndicalist notion that trade unions should act as political parties is so discredited that it has few, if any, open adherents. But, from time to time, the notion is introduced through the back door in the shape of policies which would, in practice, allocate such a role to the trade union movement.

An example of one such tendency is the premature attempt to formally incorporate the objective of socialism into trade unions and the federation to which they belong. Such a move would narrow the mass character of the trade union movement by demanding an unreal level of political consciousness from its members or affiliates as a condition for joining. It would also, incidentally, give the enemy the very excuse it needs to deal with one of its most formidable foes.

Another example, at the level of the mass democratic movement, is a recent suggestion that new grassroots United Front structures should be set up at national, regional and local community levels.[10] These structures would be restricted to sectors which are predominantly of working class origin unemployed, organised workers, rural poor, youth and students, working women, etc. The effect of this approach would be to downgrade the UDF as the umbrella of the broad legal liberation front and to replace it with a narrower front run by the trade union movement [11].

The tendency to mechanically apply the principles of trade union politics and organisation to the broader political struggle is also evident in some of the debates around questions of the democratic content of popular and working class political structures. Using the trade union movement as a model, critics of the UDF allege an absence of democratic control from below. They also express concern that the mass of the workers have very little democratic control over their revolutionary parties which claim a vanguard role. All this is contrasted with the trade union movement which, by virtue of its democratic traditions and practices, is claimed to be better equipped to represent the working class.

These positions (advanced mainly by some union-linked academics, contain a mixture of legitimate concerns relating to the defence of some fundamental principles of trade union organisation and erroneous notions about political organisation. Trade unionism in our country has been guided by appropriate

organisational forms and democratic processes. Without open public elections, complete participation of the mass of the membership in all decision-making, day-to-day accountability of officials, etc., trade unionism would lose its effectiveness.

But these very organisational forms and practices (which must be defended and deepened in the trade union movement) would become a paralysing extravagance if transplanted to a working class political party or if applied mechanically to political structures of the mass democratic movement, operating under emergency rule.

Unlike a trade union, a worker's vanguard does not, and should not, have the character of a mass movement. It cannot hope to survive in illegal conditions without clandestine methods which often, unavoidably, conflict with democratic practices. A worker's political vanguard is guided by the Leninist principles of democracy and centralism a combination whose precise mixture is dictated by the actual conditions of revolutionary struggle. An attempt to apply trade union organisational practices to such a vanguard would spell the end of revolutionary political leadership in our conditions. Equally, the trade union movement would be doomed if it attempted to act like a Communist Party.

Even a mass political movement like the UDF would be disabled politically if, before each mass action, it were obliged to go through the same kind of democratic procedures which are so vital and appropriate for workers in economic struggle against the bosses. A strike ballot in a labour dispute is a necessity; its rationale cannot be extended to a political struggle situation. The guiding core of a political mass front would paralyse itself by the continuous need for mandates and referenda from its rank and file.

Intensified repression in the recent period has, for example, imposed methods of semi-clandestinity on the UDF, unavoidably affecting some of its consultative and collective practices; a fact unjustly exploited by some of the detractors of the UDF.

We do not claim that the necessary democratic practices have always been implemented within the mass democratic movement, or that Communist Parties have never abused democracy on the excuse of centralism. But such illegitimate departures from the norms must be dealt with as a separate problem; they should not become the excuse for insisting on syndicalist practices which, in the case of the political leadership of the struggle, would lead to organisational constipation.

## **The ANC and the Working Class**

The main core of the whole democratic struggle illegal and legal is the ANC which stands at the head of the liberation alliance. As head of this alliance and prime representative of all the oppressed, it welcomes within its ranks all from whatever class they come who support and are ready to fight for the aims of the Freedom Charter. It is a revolutionary nationalist organisation with popular roots. It is not, however, 'populist'. The ANC's Strategy and Tactics recognises that there are different classes among the people with different long-term aspirations.

The overwhelming majority of the people are working class. This explains why the ANC's composition and policies show a strong bias towards the working class. It also considers it proper and necessary for socialist ideology to be discussed and understood in its ranks. But, despite the fact that the ANC has an understandable bias towards the working class it does not, and clearly should not, adopt a socialist platform which the so-called Marxist Workers' Tendency (expelled from the ANC) would like it to do. If it adopted such a platform it would destroy its character as the prime representative of all the classes among the oppressed black majority.

At the same time, for reasons already outlined, its revolutionary nationalism does, of necessity, contain a social content which reflects our specific national liberation aspirations a content which will ultimately facilitate the socialist transformation but is not premised on it. Worker participation in the ANC is one of the important ways in which our working class plays its role in the democratic revolution. But, above all, the tripartite alliance, moulded in the revolutionary underground, between the ANC, the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), and our SACP, represents a framework which expresses the political interests of our working class in the broad front of struggle.

## **The SACP and the Working Class**

Workers' political leadership must represent the working class not just in economic struggles against the bosses but, more so, in its relation to all classes of society and to the state as an organised force. We stress again that a trade union cannot carry out this role. Only a political vanguard of the working class can do so.

A vanguard party, representing the historic aspirations of the working class, cannot (like a trade union) have a mass character. It must attract the most advanced representatives of the working class; mainly professional revolutionaries with an understanding of Marxist theory and practice, an unconditional dedication to the worker's cause, and a readiness, if need be, to sacrifice their very lives in the cause of freedom and socialism. Our SACP is such a Party.

We have made a unique contribution to the ideological and organisational strengthening of the national movement. Today our Party is described as one of the two main pillars of the liberation alliance led by the ANC. As an independent Party, we have devoted our main energies to strengthen workers' organisations, to spread socialist awareness and to provide working class political leadership.

**There is no organised force in our country's history which has matched our Party's contribution to the spread of genuine workers' organisation at the point of production. We can truly claim to be the parent of black trade unionism.**

A strong trade union movement and a workers' political vanguard such as ours are essential conditions for the kind of victory in the democratic revolution which will find a working class equipped organisationally and ideologically to assert its historic role. But we emphasise again that there is both a distinction and a harmony in the character and roles of these two vital sectors. Each has a specific role to play in advancing the interests of our working class as an independent social force and as the leading class in the immediate struggle to build a united, non-racial and democratic South Africa.

This brings us directly to the next related section which touches on the theoretical basis of our approach to the building of the South African nation.

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# The South African Working Class and the National Democratic Revolution

## *Third Part*

### 5. The Building of the Nation

At its founding conference in 1912, the ANC issued a clarion call for **African** unity under the slogan, *We Are One People*. As head of the liberation alliance, it is committed to working for the creation of one South Africa which, in the words of the Freedom Charter, 'belongs to all its inhabitants, black and white'.

Are we already 'one people' or are we, as yet, only a nation in the making? In the light of the undoubted existence of ethnic differences, is the cementing of our diverse communities into a single South African nation both desirable and realisable? Does the colonial status of the dominated blacks lead us to the conclusion that there are already two nations in our country — the oppressed and the oppressor? What is the role of the working class in the struggle to constitute our nation? These are issues which go to the very root of our struggle against the racist autocracy. The national question (including the question of what constitutes a nation) perhaps more than any other, illustrates the profound truth of Lenin's remarks to the Communist Organisations of the Peoples of the East that 'you will not find the (complete) answer in any communist book'. (*National Liberation and Social Emancipation*, Progress Publishers. 1986, p.269).

Indeed, the Marxist theory of the National Question is perhaps the least developed in our revolutionary science. It offers few propositions which can be used as starting points for an analysis of concrete situations. This is especially so for the developing world where, as we shall show, attempts to invoke European models and analogies completely fail to meet the needs of the real situation.

### Stalin's Contribution

The basic Marxist-Leninist approach to the question of what constitutes a nation was, for many years, guided generally by Stalin's well-known definition. Stalin defined the nation as a community of language, culture, territory and economy. Unfortunately, there have been tendencies to treat these categories (language, culture, etc.) as a mechanical set of criteria.

As a result, in defining 'nations', questions of mother-tongue or of long-established traditional cultures have sometimes come to dominate and even displace the more significant class political and economic issues. This post-Leninist tendency gave pride of place to cultural-linguistic (or ethnic) factors at the expense of a class approach. It infected some of our own earlier debates on the national question and came dangerously close to providing (albeit unintentionally) a rationale for ethnic separatism.

For example the Comintern, in 1932, called on the Communist Party of South Africa, inter alia to advance the slogans: 'Complete and immediate national independence for the people of South Africa. For the right of the Zulu, Basuto, etc., **nations to form their own independent republics.** For the voluntary uniting of the **African nations** in a **Federation of Independent Native Republics.** The establishment of a workers' and peasants' government. Full guarantee of the rights of all national minorities, for the coloured, Indian and white toiling masses'.

In the early 50's Lionel Forman, with a bias in favour of Stalin's thesis, opened up an interesting debate on the national question which, after his untimely death, was never really followed up in the ranks of the Party.

In a symposium in Cape Town in 1954, he spoke in favour of the long-term aim of 'one single, united South African nation'. But he insisted that 'the only correct path towards (it) is through the creation of conditions by which the different national cultures in South Africa may first flower and then merge ...' And he posed the possibility of self-determination for the different ethnic communities.

'I think', he said, 'the majority of communities which have common language and psychology in South Africa are not full nations, but national groups. That is, **I think they are aspirant nations, lacking their own territory and economic cohesion, but aspiring to achieve these**' (my emphasis).

Before returning to our own country let us touch on the general question of the genesis of Nations and the problem as viewed from the African perspective.

### **The Nation and the Colonial Situation**

Stalin's thesis on the National Question may have had validity in the concrete reality of a Europe in the aftermath of the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the national realignments which followed. It was obviously also of great relevance to the post-October advance in the solution of the National Question in the Soviet Union. **But its application to our conditions or, even, to most parts of the continent of Africa is, at best, questionable.**

Using Stalin's formula as a starting point, we would have great difficulty to find in our continent many state entities that could be described as 'nations'. Applying the formula mechanically we might even be tended to lend theoretical respectability to neo-colonial inspired secessionary tendencies and (as in the case of South Africa) play about with ethnic constitutional 'solutions' which would, in effect, perpetuate minority domination.

The coming into being of an entity which can be described as a nation has a variety of historic roots. Its genesis is not necessarily connected with a single class. The modern Nation-State is not always the creation of the bourgeoisie. Nor can it be claimed, as a **universal proposition** that 'a nation is a historical category belonging (only) to the epoch of rising capitalism' (Stalin). In the post-October period some national entities (e.g. Mongolia which skipped the capitalist stage altogether) have only come into being under socialist power. **Most of the world's nation-states emerged in the post-war period and it cannot be argued that they all had their origins in a new wave of rising capitalism.**

In the colonial world generally, nation-formation was deliberately stilted, retarded and under-developed by imperial policy. But, despite this policy, the very spread of the capitalist mode of production made for objective tendencies towards the breaking down of ethnic, cultural and tribal divisions. This process was also subjectively advanced by the need for the dominated people to create a common front in the struggle against a common colonial oppression.

FRELIMO's approach to the question of nation-formation is illustrated by Marcelino dos Santos in an interview in 1973. We must bear in mind that Mozambique is a vast country with a multitude of diverse tribal and cultural groupings. Even today it could be said that the Makonde in Cabo Delgado have more in common with the Makonde of Southern Tanzania than with the Shangaans of Gaza Province who, in turn, have a close affinity to the Shangaan people of the Eastern Transvaal. Dos Santos said:

The main conditions for (the) successful rejection (of tribalism) are present. On the general point of whether we have already moulded a nation in the true sense of the word, I want to say that a nation is based on concrete realities. And the most important reality in the present stage in Mozambique is the fight against Portuguese colonialism. **It is our common fight against our common oppressor which plays an outstanding role in creating a national bond between all the diverse groups and cultures...** Of course a nation is a product of history and its formation goes through different phases. **In this sense the work for the final achievement of nationhood will continue even after independence although the**

**fundamental elements of nationhood are already in existence and in the process of being further developed in Mozambique’** . (*African Communist*, 4th Quarter 1973).

There is no absolute moral test about nation formation. The consolidation or fragmentation of disparate ethnic groups into one or into several sovereign entities cannot be judged by any **universal** formulas as to what constitutes a nation. The answer for a revolutionary is influenced by far more complex political considerations than can be contained in an enumeration of catalogues of common ‘national’ qualities.

In Africa (more especially below the Sahara) the concrete realities were dominated by a specific form of colonialism. Administrative entities were created which had little, if anything, to do with a common culture, language, economy and so on. The colonial units which imperialism created were, in most cases, determined solely by inter-imperialist power relationships and were made up of an arbitrary mixture of completely distinct socio-economic formations. The 1885 Berlin Conference was one of the high points of this process.

These administrative entities gradually acquired distinct economies. Meanwhile, however, the imperialist powers employed various mechanisms to deliberately perpetuate regional and ethnic differences in the interests of more effective control. Tribalism, indirect rule, playing off one region against the other, and preventing the emergence of a national consciousness or cohesion; these were the prime weapons in the armoury of imperialist domination.

In other words, whereas the economic functions of the nation-state created at the dawn of the capitalist era were served by the breaking down of ethnic, regional, language and cultural divisions, in most of Africa the colonial masters were served by a very opposite process. Colonial control for purposes of economic exploitation **demanding ethnic fragmentation and inter-ethnic hostility.**

The encouragement of a national awareness and cohesion became the major response from the colonised peoples. Beginning with the ANC in 1912, the creation of a national, rather than an ethnic or tribal consciousness, became a key rallying cry of virtually every liberation movement in Africa. Where a sizeable working class emerged, its work and living conditions helped undermine rural ethnic exclusiveness.

In summary, it could be said that the historic process of **spreading a national (as opposed to ethnic or tribal) consciousness and the national consolidation of existing state entities is, in the modern African era, generally a weapon of**

**liberation and social advance.** Conversely, the emphasis on regional and cultural exceptionalism (including claims to secession of ethnic regions from existing state entities) is generally designed to serve both Internal and international reaction and is, in most cases, an instrument of colonial, neo-colonial or minority domination.

The struggle for national cohesion in multi-ethnic communities does not imply the imposition of cultural uniformity. **Cultural diversity does not stand in contradiction to a national unity.** Such a unity can be made up of a totality of both distinct and intermingling cultures which 'in their totality constitute the culture of the... people as a whole' . (Interview with Lucio Lara, *African Communist*, Third Quarter, 1978).

**National self-determination correctly remains part of the Holy Grail of Marxist learning.** But, for most parts of Africa, the invocation of this right for regional or ethnic entities (either for secessionary purposes or for creating ethnically-defined political groupings) usually serves to undermine rather than to advance the right to national self-determination. And nowhere is this more so than in the context of the South African struggle.

### **The South African Case**

In the South African case it is certainly the emerging proletariat which has become the key class force for nation-building. As the most politically conscious and advanced social force in our revolution, our black working class is, at the same time, the most internationalist and the most committed to national cohesion.

**Despite the existence of cultural and racial diversity, South Africa is not a multi-national country. It is a nation in the making; a process which is increasingly being advanced in struggle and one which can only be finally completed after the racist tyranny is defeated. The concept of one united nation, embracing all our ethnic communities, remains the virtually undisputed liberation objective.**

Conversely, colonial domination in our country has, throughout its history, employed political and administrative devices to facilitate its policy of 'divide and rule' by impeding the process of nation formation. Apartheid is only the most recent and ideologically developed variant of a policy which has been practised from the very beginning of conquest. It was preceded by the British colonial strategies of Reserves and Segregation.

The pre-apartheid strategies failed to stem the tendencies towards the emergence and continued growth of an African national consciousness. Economic imperatives (including the very important factor of permanent urbanisation), and revolutionary nationalist activity combined to undermine these strategies.

The threat posed to race domination by the growing unity within the liberation camp was becoming more evident in the late 40s. To ensure its survival the ruling class sought a way of turning the clock back. Against the background of a heightened level of terror against the people and their organisations, they declared themselves to be the new champions of 'national self-determination' and launched their bantustan programme.

Twelve 'homelands' were proclaimed and offered 'independent' statehood. South Africa, so it was claimed, was now following Europe and proceeding apace with its own 'decolonisation' process. But (as the regime itself has been forced to concede) this Verwoerdian plunge into the 'final solution' has demonstrably failed. Irreversible economic processes and mass struggle and resistance once again dashed the hopes of those who plotted to reverse the nation-building momentum of the Liberation Alliance.

Despite the substantial failure of its bantustan strategy, our ruling class continues to cling to the rationale which underpinned it. The growing demand for democracy and majority rule in a united South African continues to be met by the diabolically simple answer that 'South Africa is a multi-racial country'. There is no majority. There are only minorities, all of whom must retain their economic, geographic and cultural 'heritage'. RSA radio made all this very plain in a BBC-monitored broadcast on the 28th of January, 1987:

'The government's preparation for power-sharing is a clear indication of post-apartheid South Africa. **Majority rule is nonsense in South Africa as there is no majority.** The key issue is the protection of minority rights. **There are ten African nations plus whites, coloureds and Indians, and all insist on their right to self-determination.** Negotiations for such power-sharing are under way'.

We know what this kind of 'multi-nationalism' implies. It is the prime device for continued national domination. Presented in its crude form, this 'multi-national' approach has little chance of misleading our people. But we must be on our guard against some of its more sophisticated variants.

Among these variants are the Buthelezi-backed Kwa-Natal proposals, the Tri-cameral parliament (with a possible extension of a fourth Chamber to represent Africans), and federal arrangements which give constitutional recognition to ethnic entities and 'traditional' ethnic leaders. We can expect a host of other devices designed to provide group (as opposed to individual) rights and to give veto right to ethnic communities in multi-racial legislative organs claiming to represent 'national'

entities. **These are all nuances of the same recipe; power-sharing without giving up control.**

The more recent models of 'multi-nationalism' are based on four broad 'racial' or 'national' categories: African, White, Coloured and Indian. It can hardly be disputed that, at present, the members of each category (to whatever class they belong) share a definable position as a colour group on the political and economic ladder, with the Africans occupying its lowest rung.

The three black groups suffer varying degrees of discrimination; a reality which, ironically enough, is continually exploited by the very perpetrators of the crime of discrimination. Endless attempts are made to persuade the Coloured and Indian communities to cling to their more 'privileged' position in the league table of oppression and discrimination. Fear is spread among them of majority African 'domination', in the hope that they will opt for 'the devil they know'.

But, on the whole, these minority black communities have not been taken in. The word 'black' is increasingly adopted by them to describe their political and national affinity with Africans. The massive rejection of the Tri-cameral parliament and joint participation in the major struggles against racism are among the signs of togetherness. Thus, although the process is by no means complete, the national bond among the three black groups is growing closer and closer.

### **The White Community**

A combination of economic factors, common responses to domination and ideological activity, have taken the process of nation formation some distance among the dominated. However, the national bonds which are being cemented in our country have not yet greatly affected the whites. The overwhelming majority regard themselves as a national entity not only completely separate from the blacks but also superior to them. And the Afrikaner stands out as the most hard-line partisan of this approach.

This is not the place to trace the complex factors (cultural, ideological, religious, etc.) which have served to entrench white chauvinism and Herrenvolkism deeply into the psyche of this community. But, essentially, the process had its main roots in the economic privileges built on the foundation of the intense exploitation of black (especially African) labour. These privileges accrue, in different degrees, to all members of the white community, to whatever class they belong.

The basic objectives of liberation cannot be achieved without undermining the accumulated political, social, cultural and economic white privileges. The moulding

of our nation will be advanced in direct proportion to the elimination of these accumulated privileges. The winning over of an increasing number of whites to the side of democracy is an essential part of our policy. **We cannot, however, accept constitutional schemes which are designed or calculated to perpetuate a 'multi-national' framework in order to retain the separate national identity and, therefore, the power of white racism.**

Our approach is clear and we must spread it ever more widely. The cultures and languages of the white group (like the cultures and languages of all the other groups) will have a safe haven in South Africa which, in the words of the Freedom Charter, 'belongs to all its people, black and white'; a South Africa which will ultimately realise the idea of common nationhood in its full meaning.

### **Colonialism of a Special Type and 'Two-Nations' Thesis**

Neville Alexander believes that our Party's thesis of 'colonialism of a special type' (CST) obstructs the drive towards single nationhood. He maintains that it necessarily implies a two-nations thesis (white and black) which 'holds within it the twin dangers of anti-white black chauvinism and ethnic separatism'. The thesis has also been criticised on the related ground that it allegedly encourages an approach which underplays or ignores class divisions within the black and white communities and tends to place 'populist' rather than class objectives before the working class.

CST does not imply a two-nations thesis, nor does it ignore the class divisions within the communities. The CST thesis correctly describes the reality that, in the post-1910 period, the **substance of the colonial status of the blacks has remained intact, even though its form may have altered.** It is this reality which provides a correct starting point for grappling with the complex problem of the relationship between national and class struggle. **It is obvious that until the colonial status of blacks is ended the process of building one nation cannot be completed.**

The CST thesis neither ignores class divisions within the dominant and dominated communities, nor does it postulate the existence of two fully-formed 'nations' — white and black. It does not define the ruling class as consisting of the whole white population.

It is not the CST thesis which fuels the danger of anti-white black chauvinism; it is the fact that the overwhelming majority of the white community (irrespective of class) benefits from and, therefore, supports race rule. Alexander speculates that the liberation struggle can become 'ideologically insulated' against the dangers of black anti-white chauvinism and ethnic separatism if 'the revolutionary classes accept that they are part and parcel of a single nation'. But even 'revolutionary



classes' would surely find it difficult (and the masses on whom they rely even more so) to accept that this is already so.

Anti-white chauvinism cannot be mitigated by spreading an idea based on a myth. The 'revolutionary classes' can best advance the struggle for the achievement of single nationhood if they recognise (and act on) the reality that we are not yet one nation. The strategy and tactics of the struggle to create one united South African nation can neither ignore the significance of the present white-black divide nor the different levels of oppression to which the dominated majority are subjected.

Organisational structures of the constituents of the ANC-led liberation camp and the shape of its alliances at specific historical moments, have always been guided by such factors. For example, the Congress Alliance of the late 40s and 50s consisted of the separate historically-evolved organisations representing the African, Coloured and Indian people and, later, white democrats.

This approach laid the foundation for inter-black unity in action which, more than any other factor, helped to erode ethnic political separatism. It also prepared the conditions which made it possible for the ANC to open its ranks to the other groups. In sharp contrast, the former Unity Movement acted with ostrich-like disregard of ethnic factors. In the process, it may have insulated its own small band against the dangers to which Alexander refers, but it also succeeded in insulating them from advancing the process of unity in the real world.

## Group Rights

The very strength of racist state power, the deeply-ingrained nature of white national exclusiveness, and the occasional outbreaks of inter-ethnic strife, have influenced some external academic circles, sympathetic to our cause, to raise the possibility of the liberation movement's agreeing to constitutional provisions for group rights in the post-apartheid phase. This thinking is also partly influenced by the belief that there is, in any case, no great prospect of welding South Africa's diverse ethnic groups into one nation.

For example, Dr Gleb Starushenko, a member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, told the 1986 Soviet-African conference that, in his personal opinion, a parliament which accommodated group rights should be considered for the post-apartheid period. This parliament would consist of two chambers; one on the basis of proportional representation and the other '**possessing the right of minority veto**', which could operate on the basis of 'equal representation of the four communities'. Dr Starushenko (whose pro-liberation intentions are not in dispute) would also like to see the ANC work out '**comprehensive guarantees for the white population**' and

‘programmes’ which give our ‘bourgeoisie the ... guarantee’ that there will be no broad nationalisation of capitalist property.

If this package is motivated by a search for the kind of compromise which would tempt the racists to come to the negotiating table, it is certainly not an acceptable starting point for a negotiating agenda for our liberation movement. Apart from other considerations, the racists’ own insistence on ‘group rights’ is undoubtedly linked to the preservation of control over the means of production. If this control is maintained, through the granting of minority veto powers, the most fundamental features of race domination would be perpetuated, a result which Dr Starushenko would clearly find unacceptable.

The idea of ethnic parliaments may have an additional rationale — a belief that South Africa is, and is likely to remain, a multi-national country, and that future constitutional arrangements must make provision for this reality. In this connection, the Soviet experience of the solution of the national question in the post-Czarist period, understandably informs the thinking of Soviet scholars. But to be guided by this experience in our conditions is in fact to risk bringing about the very opposite results to those which were achieved in the Soviet Union.

**In the Soviet Union a recognition of multi-nationalism was the very foundation of national liberation and self-determination;** it led to the creation of autonomous and self-governing national republics originally linked to each other in a federation and later in a union.

**In our case multi-nationalism, whether in the form of independent ethnic ‘homelands’ or parliaments based on colour-group rights constitutes the main racist recipe for the continuation of national domination by other means.**

This is not to say that all traces of ethnic exclusiveness have already been effectively erased from the political arena and that we have already become one nation. The battle is still joined to prevent ethnic separatism from making advances from positions it continues to hold under government patronage.

In particular we must not allow the regime to get away with its claims to be the main champion of ethnic languages and cultures under the guise of its ‘homelands’ policies and its dishonest brand of ‘multi-nationalism’. It is our duty not only to proclaim, but also to ensure that in a unitary democratic South Africa the language and other positive cultural heritages of the diverse groups will really flower and find effective expression.

We stand for one united, democratic South Africa based on universal adult suffrage. This strategic approach is inviolable. We cannot, at this stage, allow ourselves to be diverted by speculation about future justifiable compromises in the interests of revolutionary advance. It is clearly in struggle that we will succeed in forging our one South African nation which is already in the making.

Forging one sovereign South African nation is an integral part of the objectives of the national democratic revolution. Our national liberation movement, welding together millions of South Africans in every corner of our country, is already a major dynamising factor in the struggle to build a unified South Africa.

**The winning of the objectives of the national democratic revolution will, in turn, lay the basis for a steady advance in the direction of deepening our national unity on all fronts — economic, political and cultural — and towards a socialist transformation. For our working class nation-building means, among other things, unifying themselves nationally as the leading class whose developing culture, aspirations and economic interests become increasingly those of the overwhelming majority of our people.**

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#### **Notes:**

1. A rather snide example of this is an article in *Africa Perspectives* (June 1987), 'The Ideology and Politics of African Capitalists' by Mike Sarakinsky. Sarakinsky relies on journalistic reports of NAFCOC's accounts of its meeting with the ANC to suggest that its claim that there was 'total agreement' with the ANC on many issues implied that the vision of 'total liberation' which was presented by the ANC was tailored for the occasion. The main body of his article was written before the ANC-NAFCOC meeting and draws on NAFCOC pronouncements over a decade old. In an attempt to explain away NAFCOC's more radical postures in the recent period, which tend to contradict Sarakinsky's rather mechanical characterisations, he makes these unscholastic additions in a postscript.
2. Even where the socialist transformation is directly on the agenda, the role of the private sector cannot be dismissed. Leaving aside the lunatic excesses of Pol Pot's Kampuchea, many hard lessons in this area have been learnt by some of the established socialist states and, more recently, by African parties dedicated to a socialist advance. The **transition** period to socialism may well demand a maintenance of **selective** parts of the private sector. A mechanical and generalised elimination of this sector for the sake of satisfying sloganised orthodoxy, has often served to undermine the faith of the working people in the capacity of socialism to 'deliver the goods'.
3. In general, the class interests of the white capitalist class are not served by the objectives of the national democratic revolution. The survival of non-monopoly white business in the post-apartheid state does not provide a basis for regarding it as a potential part of the revolutionary liberation camp. White business is generally helped and not impeded by race practices. In the post-apartheid state those who merit being allowed to continue business

activities will have to conduct their operations under the more restrictive conditions specified in the Freedom Charter. However, sectors of white business can be (and have been) drawn into pressing for the abandonment of the worst excesses of apartheid; a process which helps to fragment the unity of the ruling class.

4. See eg. P. Hudson, 'The Freedom Charter and the Theory of the National Democratic Revolution', *Transformation* [1] 1986.

5. It should, however, be conceded that our own formulations have sometimes been imprecise, and have invited the charge that we treat stages as compartments, as 'things-in-themselves'.

6. Not to speak of imperialism's unending pattern (in Asia, Latin America, Africa and the Middle East) of imposing and helping to sustain brutal tyrannies in the name of 'democracy' and 'human rights'.

7. Deputy Director of the Institute of African Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences, interviewed in *Work in Progress* no. 48 by Howard Barrell.

8. Even when the construction of socialism is directly on the agenda, class alliances remain in place, more immediately to maintain socialism in the face of imperialist-supported counter-revolution and, in the long term, to move to a higher stage.

9. In addition, the most basic purpose of a trade union to force genuine reforms in the work situation within the existing economic framework tends generally to nurture reformist rather than revolutionary political tendencies. This perhaps explains why working class parties that have been fathered by a trade union movement and continue to be dominated by it (as in Great Britain) usually pursue social-democratic rather than revolutionary objectives.

10. This proposal is a distorted follow-up of the perfectly correct NUM-sponsored COSATU congress resolution that called for close alliances between the trade union movement and militant sectors of the community; an approach which was adopted by the Congress as a counter to the NUMSA-sponsored resolution which explicitly stressed a front dominated by 'socialist' elements.

11. The relationship between a trade union federation and organisations such as the UDF still needs to be worked out more precisely. A case can be made out for the view that direct affiliation of a trade union federation (as opposed to individual unions) is not the immediate answer. But it is vital that institutionalised links be mutually agreed upon between two such key actors in the democratic struggle. This approach appears from the February 1988 UDF circular which defines the United Front as '... a close working relationship between UDF, COSATU, NECC and the Churches ... There is a need for COSATU and the UDF to create permanent structures at national and regional levels'.

12. 'Approaches to the National Question in South Africa', in *Transformation* 1(1986) p. 83. Alexander also suggests that the wording of the Freedom Charter suggests a four nation thesis.

13. *Weekly Mail* January 9-15, 1987

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